

ST. TERESA'S AT COSPICUA DISCALCED CARMELITES In Malta - A Short Historical Survey

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(continued from previous issue of Carmel-Lights)

ST. TERESA'S IN THE MAKING

Foresighted and calculating as he was by temperament, Paul-Simon could scarcely have overlooked the difficulties involved in the handling of this projected Foundation. To cope with such, he wisely chose to involve as many influencing personalities at his disposal. He obtained the patronage of Urbanus VIII, reigning Pontiff, as well as that of the Catholic Monarch of Spain, Ferdinand III. None could have gone as far with the Grandmaster of St. John's, at the time Prince of these Islands. The two gracefully obliged with the appropriate commendatory letters to the latter. And that he would leave no loopholes in effectively dealing with the Grandmaster, he wisely entrusted the initial approaches to the Order of St. John, and the rest of the spadework involved to two outstanding Religious in the person of the Spaniard Joseph-Angelus of the Mother of God, and the Frenchman Theodosius of the Holy Spirit.

The said two Religious reached Malta some time in October 1625. On their landing they were met by none else than their acknowledged friend and benefactor-to-be of this Foundation, Mgr. Balthassar Cagliares, Bishop of these Islands, who graced as well the two Fathers with his warm hospitality, while they dealt with the Grandmaster and his Council in connection with the proposed Foundation.

Antoine De Paule's initial reaction proved all but well-promising. To be sure, not altogether incomprehensible and unexpected. Still hard hit by the aftermath of the Grand Siege, the Island could only with great difficulty provide for the ever-increasing population. On the other hand, a variety of Religious already overcrowded the Island, and to make things worse, the Knights were unable to be pleased with their vocational standards. In such circumstances the Knights could hardly have been expected to display any enthusiasm at the prospect of having 'just another Religious Order' in addition to those already in their midst.

At the next meeting of the Grand Council well-wishers of the Foundation intervened with attempts to solve the apparent deadlock. Commandeur Villeneuve, a French member of the Council, backed by papers of the same Langue, came forward with a rather simplistic suggestion. In his eagerness to water down the consideration of the overcrowding on the Island, he advanced a crude-sounding proposal. He would have the CALCED Carmelites evicted from their House at Valletta, that their DISCALCED Brethren might be established there in their stead.

Foremost in opposing this raw compromise were the emissaries themselves. Their own Superiors - they interposed - would never be part to that primitive deal, the more so among Brethren. Common sense happily prevailed, and a second one was immediately tabled for adoption. Its only merit was that of taking the heat off from the first. Otherwise it was as simplistic, even if sweetened by a touch of humour about it. Thanks to the latter trimming it won the day. Commandeur Salagier would have as many undesirables put off the Island to make room for the number of Discalced Carmelites likely due to be involved in the projected Foundation.

The Chronicler of this eventful meeting of the Grand Council leaves the reader amusingly guessing about the precise reaction this second intervention caused among the members of the August assembly, except that the Grandmaster was forthcoming with his desired good-pleasure for the Foundation, moved, as one would be bound to conjecture, by more overriding considerations than either proposal of the Grandcrosses (1).

Needless to add that the successful outcome met with the satisfaction of all concerned, not least of the Discalced Carmelites that had carried out the complicated negotiations with vigorous yet dignified skill and tact.

ST. TERESA'S ON THE MOVE

From this point on, matters moved quickly. Joseph-Angelus of the Mother of God hastened to acquaint his

Superiors in Rome with the happy conclusion of the mission entrusted to him and his companion, and immediately proceeded to nearby Palermo that he might be installed Prior of one of the two Houses there, an office to which he had been elected very shortly before this last briefing. He left Fr. Theodoros behind him, seemingly in accordance with a prearranged plan, providing for the latter to the following up of the concrete arrangements for the erection of the Foundation, helped in the matter by the arrival of two more Religious from Rome, Alexius of St. Angelus and a lay brother.

Bishop Cagliares was only too pleased to honour his undertaking of material help. In fact he was forthcoming in this matter with something amounting to a blank cheque.

Theodorus and his two companions agreed among them on a site at Bur Mula, now known as Cospicua. It had more than one advantage. A site nearly in no man's land, and within the Grand Harbour area, the latter being of much more importance than in our time, for its being within sight of where ships loaded and unloaded passengers and cargo. And it also had a third signal advantage in that it comprised existent living quarters with adjacent orchards, wherein the temporary Community might settle reasonably comfortably until the new monastery and church would eventually be built.

The surrounding population had also the benefit of the Fathers' ministry available within a few weeks after their settlement in that area, an advantage that proved mutual in that the devout faithful, so served, came forward with others with appreciable contributions of more than one kind. For it is well known how many were the endowments made right from those very early times both towards the construction of the church and monastery, as well as towards the day to day needs of the Community at full strength.

Temporary alterations to the buildings just purchased for the Fathers proceeded at such a pace that within a month a provisional chapel was set up, which Bishop Cagliares had the pleasure of blessing and therein also celebrating the first High Mass on the Sunday within the octave of the Epiphany of the following year 1626. There was great rejoicing as the faithful turned up in great numbers to join the Fathers in marking the happy occasion. The events leading to this red-letter day were recorded by an eyewitness, and making charming reading. 'In the name of God. First Foundation and erection of St. Teresa's and its Monastery in Malta. In the year of the Incarnation of the Lord 1625, occupying St. Peter's Chair Pope Urbanus VIII, under the reign of the Most August Ferdinand III Emperor of the West, under the reign of the Catholic Philip IV and the Grandmastership of Frere Antoine de Paule of the Langue of Provence of the Order of St. John Baptist, Prince of these Islands of Malta, under the Generalate of the very Reverend Paul-Simon of Jesus-Mary of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, it was ordained by this last mentioned that Fr. Joseph-Angelus of the Mother of God, of Spanish Nationality and newly elected Prior of Palermo should before his installment to that priorate forthwith proceed to the Island of Malta that he might engage there and deal with all due diligence for the erection of a House of his Order, led to this decision by the zeal fostered for the salvation of souls. There, accordingly, the said Joseph-Angelus of the Mother of God duly proceeded in the company of Fr. Theodosius of the Holy Spirit of French Nationality. Having the two of them arrived there, they commenced dealing with the commissioned task, concerning which, as it is wont in all matters relating to God, they came across with more than one hurdle. Having, however, been taken into consideration the great good due to ensue from this praiseworthy undertaking for the major glory of God as well as the salvation of souls, all the difficulties were happily overcome in a comparatively short time. Apart from their forthcomingness in granting their good-pleasure for the Foundation, the Grandmaster and his Council were also pleased to provide that the Fathers would be at liberty to pick any site considered best conducive to the purpose entertained for the new Foundation, and in full accordance with their pious wishes. Then, having Fr. Joseph-Angelus of the Mother of God set out in the meantime to this priorate at Palermo, the Very Reverend Fr. Matthias, of Spanish Nationality, newly elected to succeed Fr. Paul-Simon of Jesus-Mary in the Government of the Order, this new General provided that Fr. Alexus of St. Angelus, from Naples and Brother John, from Rome, to proceed without delay to Malta in order to help and bring to completion the same Foundation. On their arrival in Malta they were made most welcome by both the Knights and the faithful who extended to them every consideration and material help. Greatest of all the generosity of Fra Balthassar Cagliares of happy memory, Maltese by birth and Bishop of Malta, from whom the Fathers received substantial alms and other help towards the new Foundation. Having the said Fathers chosen by mutual agreement a site at Bur Mula for the construction of their church and monastery, the said Bishop, of his own resources bought for them from private owners at the price of scudi 1500, an extensive site with adjoining orchards facing the public road, and corresponding to where the present

church and House lie. The purchase took place in the Acts of Notary Public Pietro Paolo Vincella, and dated 11th December 1625. By virtue of this instrument Bishop Cagliares, so great a benefactor of this Community, gave and transferred every personal dominion on the site, premises and orchards as above listed, irrevocably and as 'inter vivos' to the said Alexius of St. Angelus and Brother John, on behalf of their Holy Reformed Order of St. Mary of Mt. Carmel and under the title of St. Teresa, here (the said Religious) present to this effect and accepting from the said Mgr Bishop Cagliares, donator, under the express condition that the same site should serve for the construction of the new church and monastery of their Holy Order, and for the purpose of there engaging in divine worship and for the spiritual welfare of the people of these Islands.' (2)

A HOST OF WELL-WISHERS

The affection and loyalty of Mgr. Cagliares towards St. Teresa and her Reform was so marked and deep-rooted that it was to become contagious among the TESTAFERRATA'S to our days, via the Bishop's niece married into that Family.

The names of other many benefactors are also faithfully recorded. Well-wishers vied in enhancing the settlement of the Discalced Carmelites in Malta over these 350 years. The contribution which the College was about to make as from eight years later to the Missionary Field, was made possible by the generosity of these benefactors. To provide our readers with a full list of them, would take us beyond the scope of this monograph. We limit ourselves to just a representative sample of the long list enshrined on their lasting memory in the Conventual Acts of this House. Among the Knighthood of St. John's, Girlanda Ballius de Lyon, Grandcross Louis de Chatellone, Commandeur Frere Charles Aldobrandini, Ballius Salvago, Grandmaster's Secretary Jean Baptist; among the Nobility of Malta, Bishop Cagliares and his sister Ursolica, Fabricius and Peter Paul Testaferrata, Bernard Count Piscopo; among the Commoners, Vincentia Ischia, Ignatius de Ribera, Nicholas Cassar and Maria Coniglio. One may not help recording with gratitude the obvious accord between Heaven and Earth in blessing in no small way the lasting settlement of this House with the apostolic purpose to it assigned.

STREAMLINING OF ST. TERESA'S

Thus auspiciously launched on its course, this House came during its first eight years under the jurisdiction first of the Roman Province of the Reform, then that of Naples, and finally that of Sicily. These were the ten years employed in bringing to full completion the construction works of church and monastery.

The Governing Body of the Reform had been marking its time to go through with its original plan, as witnessed by the number of Visitors (7) dispatched on the spot to report, among other matters on the progress with which the works were proceeding (3). The hour was soon to strike for the announcement of the official birthday of St. Teresa's Missionary College, by that same body.

During the proceedings of the General Chapter held in 1632 at which Paul-Simon of Jesus-Mary, from whose brilliant mind had come forward the original idea of the now ready for immediate launching, St. Teresa's Missionary College, was returned to serve his second term as General of the Teresian Reform, besides the precise educational purpose of the College, a long term policy was also drawn for the stability and good government of the College.

Among other deliberations, it was decided that from that date this House would become the sole and exclusive responsibility of the Definitory General of the Order; that the same would be known as St. Teresa's Missionary College; that the Religious in its Community would be drafted from all the Provinces of the Reform; that the Rector would be elected by the General Chapter, and his assistant sive First Discreet by the Definitory General (4).

THE HOLY SEE'S INTERVENTION

These clear-cut provisions became known to the Holy See. Urbanus VIII not only confirmed them, but made them even more air-tight with regard to their further inviolability.

The erection of St. Teresa's College was a matter of a purely domestic nature as far as the Teresian Reform was concerned. In such cases the Holy See does not usually interfere directly. The fact that in this particular case it did intervene with the solemnity of its Bull DECET NOS implies that its particular concern points to calculated immediate interests in the missionary adventure of the College. To justify our reading of the intervention we follow it up with an English translation of the said Bull. "URBANUS VIII. That it may ever be remembered. It is fitting that by virtue of our pastoral office we should show our concern for the well-being of those who inspired by zeal for propagating the Catholic Faith, are not in the least afraid to setting off with untold sacrifice to themselves, and danger to their life, to the farthest regions of the world, so that through the saving message of God's Word may there bring into Christ's Fold those deeply engulfed in error. Whereas, therefore, the Monastery of the Order of Discalced Carmelites in Malta has been detached, as we have been informed, by the Definitory General from the Province of Sicily, empowered thereupon by the General Chapter, so that such Monastery may serve for the study of languages, as well as that it may serve as Hospice for those leaving for the Missions or passing through the Island or returning therefrom. We wanting as far as it rests with us in the Lord, provide for the orderly government of the aforesaid Monastery, and acting on the advice of the Cardinals of Holy Mother Church entrusted with the task of the Propagation of Faith, as well as by virtue of our Apostolic Authority and conformity with the tenor of these present, put the said Monastery under the immediate authority of the Prepositus General, his Vicar General or Definitory General, in office now and in the future, as it has been in actual fact ever since the MDCXXXIII to this day; and further that the Prior of the said Monastery be elected by the General Chapter representing the whole body of the same Order or having that office become vacant outside the Chapter, by the Definitory General; further, we also resolve and ordain that no Superiors or General Chapters may decide or do anything whatsoever against the tenor of these Letters concerning the dependency and government by the Prior as elected in the manner aforementioned, without the previous knowledge and consent of our said Brethren, decreeing that it shall be so and not otherwise, as laid down in these Letters that is whatever Judges in Ordinary, Auditors Delegate even in cases of the Apostolic Palace, or Cardinals of Holy Mother Church, even a Latere Delegate, may decide or define anything in these matters, and which be null and void where they so did in either bad or good faith, inclusive of Statutes however strengthened by oath, apostolic confirmation and other whatsoever entrenchment, customs, privileges, indults and Apostolic Letters to the contrary of the foregoing, however granted, confirmed or renewed. With the foregoing, each and all of whatever tenor being considered as fully sufficiently explained, we in a special manner and explicitly derogate them to the extent and effect of these Letters, otherwise unaffected in their force. All else to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at St. Peter's in Rome, sealed with our signet-ring on the second day of March MDCXXXVIII, the twenty-first year of Our Pontificate."

SOME STATISTICS

Raised to such an exalted status, this House assumed an image that rivaled that of St. Pancratius's itself. We have just underlined the regard in which the Holy See held the newly born College, and its hopes for the years ahead. That that trust was not ill-placed is borne out by the outstanding contributions the same College made in the Missionary Field, throughout its lifetime. This will presently be our task to show. For like a tree that is judged by its fruit, so the College ought to appear as having its purpose fulfilled.

As we pass to this stage of our work we confess that it turned out to be the hardest in the course of the compilation of these notes. Without any aspersion directed to anybody else any more than to ourselves, our Cospicua Archives were allowed for too long a time to remain dormant and undisturbed when the sun shone. The last war sought its revenge by playing havoc on them. The lot that could be salvaged was carried thrice from one place to another in random receptacles, until deposited back to where it had belonged, only to lick its too many scars. It was some time later at this stage that we commenced exploring for our much needed data.

The yield proved less encouraging than we had hoped, owing to lack of proper filing. For a more thorough history, the latter must be first undertaken by somebody with the right skills, not at our disposal. The ACTS fortunately available in their entirety and undamaged, and a few scattered documents provided the only sources of light. The many long hours employed in deciphering events and situations perhaps deserved a larger, richer harvest. It was not to be. We have had therefore to make the best of what responses we procured from either the ACTS or the other tight-lipped documents. 'Tight-lipped' owing to our failure in tracing other

related documents they referred us to for their fuller reading.

We start our jigsaw puzzle by giving some statistics concerning the Student Body. These we chose to log in hops of ten years each, except for the tail.

1636 - 1646: 30 students; 1647 - 1657: 22 students;
1658 - 1668: 17 students; 1669 - 1679: 26 students;
1680 - 1690: 22 students; 1691 - 1701: 26 students;
1702 - 1712: 19 students; 1713 - 1723: 20 students;
1724 - 1734: 17 students; 1735 - 1745: 21 students;
1746 - 1756: 20 students; 1757 - 1782: 5 students;

A total of 245 students for 146 years (1636 - 1782) speaks for itself in the light of the manner of recruitment, the scope of the College, its physical capacity, as well as its financial resources. This complex background will better unfold as we proceed with these Notes.

At the year 1782 the Reform's Provinces of the St. Elias Congregation were everywhere disbanded owing to the repercussions of the French Revolution throughout the Continent. As the Malta College exclusively depended on recruits from abroad, with this only potential drying out, the College could not but die a natural death. A reduced Community, however, survived under a different format and assignment. This phase will be covered in a postscript to these NOTES.

(to be continued in next issue)

1. Louis de St. Therese: *Annales de Carm Dechauses de France*, Vol. II, p. 812. 2. LOOSE Mss: *Foundation*, pp. 1-2. 3. *Liber Visitationum Generalium*: years 1627-1632. 4. Eusebius of All Saints: *Enchiridion Congregationis Italiano*, Rome 1737, pp. 105-106.